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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 IRAN RPO DUBAI 000025

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN MP COMMENTS ON POLITICAL STATE OF PLAY

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian Burns, Director, Iran Regional Presence  
Office, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S) Summary: A reformist member of the Majles said the Supreme Leader favors Islamic regional interests over national interests and called the president a puppet of the leader. He claimed some radicals wanted war as an excuse to crack down on dissent and cover up their shortcomings. He acknowledged reformists' limited ability to impact policy but called the threats of impeachment a powerful tool. The long-term goal of the reformist coalition Mosharekat is to reform the constitution to eliminate or change the position of Supreme Leader to an elected, accountable position. He advised reducing what he called the negative tone of VOA's Farsi broadcasts and focusing on supplying objective information to produce an informed electorate. End summary.

2.(S) On April 11, IRPOffs met with a member of the Majles who is aligned with the reformist coalition Mosharekat (also called the Islamic Iran Participation Front). The MP shared his opinions about the state of internal politics in Iran and commented on international crises related to Iran. He has met with IRPOffs previously, on the fringe of his US visa applications. He claims ongoing communication with other reform leaders, including former President Khatami.

Supreme Leader: Islamic interests over national  
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3.(S) The MP believes that Supreme Leader Khamenei aspires to become the "emperor" of the Islamic world and is willing to sacrifice Iranian national interests for this goal. He sees President Ahmadi-Nejad as merely a puppet of the Supreme Leader, under the leader's complete control. Ahmadi-Nejad, in turn, sees more pragmatic conservatives such as Larijani and Qalibaf as his main rivals. The MP claimed the president is not worried about reformists.

4.(S) Speaking about Iran-US tensions, the MP opined that some conservatives in Iran want to go to war for the following reasons (Note: These views are shared by some other contacts. Endnote):

-- to crack down on reformists and further resist change;  
-- to appear strong and capable to the Iranian public, as

defenders of the nation;  
-- to hide government failures.

#### Threats of impeachment: the reformist weapon of choice

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5.(S) The MP claimed that after the December 15 elections, hardliners attempted to take away the seat won in the Tehran Majles by-election by female reformist Soheila Jelodarzadeh. (Note: This is the first time IRPO has heard this claim. Endnote) The MP said that reformists united and threatened to impeach the interior minister, and Ms. Jelodarzadeh kept her seat.

6.(S) The MP mentioned other past efforts to impeach administration officials, including the president, noting they had failed to gather enough support. He said, however, if there is another UNSC resolution against Iran following UNSCR 1747, reform groups are determined to impeach Foreign Minister Mottaki, and ultimately President Ahmadi-Nejad. The MP indicated they were more likely to be able to gather the votes needed to impeach Mottaki than Ahmadi-Nejad, but he said they were determined to make an effort. The MP praised the passage of UNSC resolutions 1737 and 1747 as effective diplomacy and specifically praised the efforts and rhetoric of Under Secretary Burns.

7.(S) The MP said the Mosharekat reformist coalition has the eventual goal of changing the constitution to eliminate or change the position of the Supreme Leader to an elected office with accountability. He noted, however, that some reformists, such as former Majles speaker Karroubi, are opposed to amending the constitution. The MP claimed that Karroubi, former president Khatami, and even Expediency Council chair Rafsanjani cannot criticize the government as much as they might want to, because they would be marginalized.

IRGC

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8.(S) The MP said the Iranian press has reported very few details about the identities of the five Iranians detained by the US in Irbil, which he saw as a strong indication the men are military, not diplomats as the Iranian government claims. Separately, he claimed that according to fellow Majles deputy and former IRGC officer, Health Commission rapporteur Dr. Heydarpur, members of the IRGC do not necessarily support Ahmadi-Nejad. They must, however, follow the dictates of the Supreme Leader.

9.(S) The MP claimed the government is very concerned about the whereabouts of former deputy Defense Minister Ali Reza Asgari, who reportedly went missing in Turkey in February 2007. According to the MP, Asgari has the rank of IRGC commander and is a key IRGC insider with access to a great deal of sensitive information. As the government is uncertain whether he defected or was abducted, it does not know whether to attack him as a traitor and a liar or defend him as a captured hero.

#### The UK sailor crisis

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10.(S) Regarding the government's detention of 15 British sailors, the MP opined that the government had planned the incident as a diversion from UNSCR 1747, which was eliciting public criticism of the government's handling of the nuclear issue. Citing a widely repeated rumor that the UK has control and influence over the clerical government ("everybody knows the mullahs usually obey England"), the MP doubted that the sailor crisis would have escalated beyond diplomacy, calling it simply a political stunt.

VOA broadcasts too anti-Iran?

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11.(S) The MP believed that the underlying theme of Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts was regime change for Iran in all but name, which he said undermines USG claims that its policy towards Iran is changed behavior, not regime change. He argued that predominantly negative coverage of Iran is counter-productive, alienating viewers. In order to educate the people and work toward the goal of democracy promotion in Iran, he recommended that the VOA report facts and objective information, with the goal of creating a better-informed Iranian public.

12.(C) Comment: This Majles deputy is an outspoken member of the reformist minority faction in the Majles, with views representative of the Khatami-era reformist school of thought. He is one of a small number of reformists from the previous Majles who are still active within the system, and has demonstrated willingness to publicly criticize the Ahmadi-Nejad government. He claims his car was recently vandalized after he gave a critical speech, and he does not think he will be allowed to run again in 2008. While it is doubtful he has much direct contact with members of government, his comments about the political state of play in Iran are valuable coming from inside the system. He acknowledges that the reformists in the Majles have little ability to directly effect policy changes but claims the threat of impeachment has weight.

13.(SBU) Comment continued: Although the MP did not specifically mention the recently aired VOA interview with Abdul-Malek Rigi, the leader of the violent Baluchi separatist group Jundallah with his criticisms of VOA programming, that interview in particular was widely condemned in Iran. Jundallah claimed responsibility for February terrorist attacks in Iran's southeastern Sistan-vā-Baluchestan province that killed 11 and injured 31. The Foreign Ministry spokesman released a statement about the Rigi interview, saying "the aforementioned terrorist is under prosecution for drug smuggling, kidnapping, murder, and injuring some of our compatriots, so what VOA has done is in direction of double standards of the US government in fighting against terrorism."

BURNS